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THE NORMALIZATION OF SCHOOL FUNDRAISING IN ONTARIO: AN ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Fundraising is common in Canada's public schools despite objections from some parents, educators, and other citizens who argue that the practice perpetuates inequities between schools and communities. In this article I first situate school fundraising in North America within its broader socio-historical contexts. I then describe Hajer's (1997) argumentative discourse theory that grounds my investigation of the struggle over fundraising policy that has taken place in Ontario over the past 20 years. Drawing on findings from an argumentative discursive analysis of 159 texts produced since 1996, I present the arguments (i.e., the story lines) of two discourse coalitions that have engaged in the struggle over the meaning of school fundraising: the fund-the-basics coalition and the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition. I demonstrate the dominance of the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition's argument by showing diverse ways the practice has become institutionalized and highlight aspects of the policy context that have contributed to the normalization of school fundraising. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the utility of Hajer's argumentative discourse theory and analysis in education policy research and highlight contributions of the current study to understanding of advocacy, media, and education policy change.

Pizza lunches, a family karaoke night, sales of hats, water bottles, and hockey tickets—these are only a handful of the fundraising initiatives undertaken at my local elementary school in the past few months. Are these initiatives cause for concern or simply strategies for bringing the community together, showing school pride, or enriching students' school experiences? While fundraising may include efforts to raise money for charitable purposes or from corporate donors and partnerships, in this article I focus on fundraising activities that aim to generate

private funds from members of schools' local communities to augment public funding of schools. Public schools in Ontario are generating more private funds than ever before (People for Education [P4E], 2015; Winsa, 2015), yet resistance to school fundraising has accompanied its growth over the past 20 years. In this article I present findings from an empirical study of arguments mobilized by diverse actors in the struggle over school fundraising policy that has taken place in the province since 1996. The findings demonstrate that despite efforts to construct it otherwise, school fundraising is enacted as a practice that is both necessary and desirable in many communities.

In this article I first situate school fundraising within the broader context of neoliberalism and briefly review existing scholarship on fundraising. I then describe Hajer's (1997) argumentative discourse theory that grounds the study, present the study's data sources, and explain the method of analysis, argumentative discourse analysis (ADA). Next, I present the arguments (i.e., story lines) of two discursive coalitions that have engaged in the struggle over the meaning of school fundraising: the fund-the-basics coalition and the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition. I show how school fundraising has become institutionalized and highlight aspects of the policy context that have contributed to the normalization of this practice. I conclude with a discussion of the utility of Hajer's argumentative discourse theory and ADA in education policy research and highlight contributions of the current study to understanding of advocacy, media, and education policy change.

Contexts of Increased School Fundraising

School fundraising, while not new, has increased over the past 20 years in Ontario and beyond. Its growth both reflects and is driven by neoliberal discourses dominant in many

countries across the world, including Canada (Porter, 2012). Central ideas of neoliberalism include the belief that the economic, social, and political spheres are best organized according to market principles and the view that the state should develop policies that encourage institutions and individuals to conform to market norms (W. Brown, 2006; Larner, 2000). Neoliberalism valorizes, promotes, and normalizes privatization, individualism, competition, meritocracy, consumption, and entrepreneurialism (Gilbert, 2013).

Fundraising is one means of privatization “within and of schools” (Carpenter, Weber, & Schugurensky, 2012, p. 147; Robertson, 2005). Other kinds of privatization in public education include partial public funding of private schools; government and board contracting of services from private companies; initiatives enabling public schools and boards to offer services for-profit; private actors participating in the governance of schools; re-designing schools according to business models and market principles; and the diversification of funding, including private funds (Ball, 2009; Carpenter et al., 2012; Pinto, 2012; Lubienski, 2006; Poole & Fallon, 2015; Robertson & Dale, 2013). Privatization has changed the nature of the relationships between individuals, education, and society by redefining students and parents as consumers and constructing education as first and foremost a private good (Lubienski, 2006; Robertson & Dale, 2013).

It was within this neoliberal context that in 1995 Ontario’s newly elected Progressive Conservative government made dramatic cuts to public education and later, in 1997, changed how schools in the province were funded. Not unique to Ontario, public schools across North America have confronted decreased public funding even as expectations for schools have increased (Brent & Lunden, 2009; Froese-Germain, Hawkey, Larose, McAdie, & Shaker, 2006; Pistiolis, 2012; Zimmer, Krop, & Brewer, 2003). The costs of providing education, constraints

on how public funds can be spent, and competition for students under school choice policies have also increased (Brent & Lunden, 2009; Carpenter et al., 2012; Froese-Germain et al., 2006; Sattlem, 2007). School fundraising efforts have intensified, in part, to compensate for public funding shortfalls, meet growing demands, and address policy changes. Some governments, school boards, and schools have introduced fundraising policies that outline related processes, responsibilities, and limitations. Ontario's Ministry of Education introduced the province's first provincial fundraising policy, the *Fundraising Guideline*, in 2012.

Parents, local community members, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, alumni, colleges and universities, and, in the USA, philanthropic organizations are all potential sources of private funds (Cuatto, 2003; Miller, 2012; Molnar, Boninger, Harris, Libby & Fogarty, 2013; Pistiolis, 2012). Funds are raised in a range of ways, including charging user fees, selling products, hosting special events, soliciting private donations, making exclusive marketing agreements, securing grants, selling advertising space, renting space, selling online course materials, providing consulting services, and charging tuition to international students (Brent & Lunden, 2009; Froese-Germain et al., 2006; Poole & Fallon, 2015; Shaker, 2014).

Money raised through school fundraising is used for a range of purposes. Some fundraised dollars are donated to charities, such as the Terry Fox Foundation (Findlay, 2011), and to under-resourced schools and communities in Canada and abroad. Many schools use funds to purchase materials and provide activities to enrich the curriculum and engage students. These goods and activities include school supplies, transportation, clubs, books, technology, schoolyard revitalizations, sports equipment, guest speakers, professional performances, athletic and academic programs, field trips, musical instruments, and extracurricular activities (Froese-Germain et al., 2006; P4E, 2015; Pistiolis, 2012). Funds raised may also be used to offset funds

in school budgets used to buy items that schools are not allowed to buy using private dollars, such as textbooks (Pistiolis, 2012).

There is limited research on school fundraising policies and practices across Canada. A collaborative effort by the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Federation des syndicats de l'enseignement in 2006, the only national study of its kind to date, found that fundraising was common, with school trips and library books as the items most often supported by fundraising (Froese-Germain et al., 2006). Further, it reported that the amounts raised vary across provinces, school level, and language of instruction. For example, in the 2003/04 school year Ontario schools reported raising \$14,072, while schools in the North raised \$27,700 (Froese-Germain et al., 2006). P4E, an advocacy group in Ontario, conducts annual surveys of schools and reports regularly on fundraising effort and outcomes. In 2015, P4E reported that 99% of elementary and 78% of secondary schools hosted fundraising activities by students, parents, and staff. The total amounts raised and reported by schools varied from \$0 to \$250,000 (P4E, 2015). Social Planning Toronto and journalists from the *Toronto Star* have investigated fundraising by individual schools and similarly report vast differences in the amounts raised by schools (Social Planning Toronto, 2011; Winsa & Rushowy, 2011; Winsa, 2015).

Many concerns have been raised about school fundraising, including the time and energy spent by teachers, students, and administrators on this activity rather than on teaching and learning; the creation of competition between students and schools; and growing inequities between schools and neighbourhoods since some schools can raise substantially more money than others (Cuatto, 2003; Froese-Germain et al., 2006; Pistiolis, 2012). For example, elementary schools in Toronto's most affluent schools raised 36 times more funds than the poorest schools

over 3 years (Social Planning Toronto, 2011). A study by Pizzoferrato (2014) determined that children in schools that raise less funds also have lower test scores on Ontario's standardized tests and face greater external challenges, such as families on social assistance, families categorized as low income, and single-parent dwellings. Ultimately, some critics argue, fundraising undermines the democratic commitments of public education, including equity and concern for the community, and absolves governments of adequately funding public schools (Cuatto, 2003; P4E, 2015; Pistiolis, 2012; Social Planning Toronto, 2011). Advocates of school fundraising, on the other hand, assert that it can be a good way to engage parents in their children's schools, that schools desperately need the money, that parents should be able to support their children if they choose to do so, and that fundraising might increase equity (Brent & Lunden, 2009). Indeed, many of these arguments have been mobilized by citizens and groups in Ontario since 1996, and they play an important role in the struggle over fundraising policy that is the focus of this article.

Argumentative Discourse Theory

This study was grounded in Hajer's (1993, 1997, 2006) argumentative discourse theory. Arising from his study of environmental policy change in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, Hajer (1997), like Fulcher (1999) and Fischer (2003), views politics and policies as struggles for discursive dominance wherein actors attempt to persuade others to support their definitions of the social world. A discourse is "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer, 2006, p. 67). Discursive struggles, and hence

struggles over policies and their meanings, take place within the context of broader cultural discourses (Fischer, 2003) and institutional practices (Hajer, 2006).

Policy actors refer to story lines in their change efforts (Hajer, 1997). Story lines are concise statements that summarize and simplify complex narratives about what the world is like and what it should be like (Hajer, 2006). Story lines act as shorthands in discussions and disguise not only the complexity of a policy issue but also differences in actors' understanding of it (Hajer, 2006). Story lines position actors, assign praise and blame, construct policy problems, and create a social and moral order (Hajer, 1997). Actors are attracted to particular story lines because they "sound right"; and whether a story line sounds right is influenced by its plausibility, the perceived credibility of other actors mobilizing the story line, the practices in which the story line is produced, and the acceptability of the story line for actors' discursive identities (Hajer, 1997, p. 63). Importantly, Hajer's argumentative discourse theory posits that actors' beliefs are constituted in part from both discourses and contexts, and when one (or both) changes, actors' beliefs and values may change as well.

Actors engaging the same story lines in struggles over policy meanings form *discourse coalitions* that advocate or sustain particular interpretations of social situations (Hajer, 1997, 2006). These actors do not necessarily know one another, do not necessarily share interests, and they do not engage in the same policy change efforts as a consequence of some coordinated action or leadership (Hajer, 1993). Yet, they understand a social practice in the same way and take up and mobilize the same story lines in their efforts to change policy.

In sum, Hajer's (2006) argumentative approach recognizes the strategic efforts of actors who engage in struggles over the meaning of policy and aim to influence policy through

argumentation. It also recognizes, however, that policy actors and their efforts are constrained and enabled by social structures beyond their conscious control.

A discourse coalition may be said to be dominant (and its story lines hegemonic) if two conditions are present. The first condition is *discourse structuration*, which occurs when the coalition “dominates the discursive space” (Hajer, 1993, p. 48). Structuration is evident in the second condition, the condition of *discourse institutionalization*, where the discourse is evident in institutional arrangements including its practices and policies (Hajer, 1993). Argumentative discourse analysis, discussed below, provides a means of identifying story lines mobilized by discourse coalitions in struggles over policy meanings.

Methodology

Argumentative discourse analysis (ADA) aims to identify story lines, how disparate actors mobilize them as members of discourse coalitions, and how a discourse coalition and its story lines become dominant (or not) through consideration of the policy context. Based on Hajer (2006), the questions that guided the study and analysis I describe below were as follows:

1. What are the story lines in the struggle over fundraising policy in Ontario, 1996–2015?
2. Who are the members of the discourse coalitions that mobilized these story lines?
3. Which story line(s) is(are) dominant?
4. What were the contexts within which the argumentative struggle took place?
5. How has the dominant story line maintained its dominance over time?

While school fundraising may involve many different sources of funds, in this study I focus on activities aimed at generating money for a school from members of its local community to augment public funding.

Data Sets

I examined two sets of data in the current study. I collected the first set for a study (Winton, 2016) that examined how P4E, an advocacy organization in Ontario, has engaged in the struggle over the meaning of fundraising policy since 1996. The set contains 39 documents produced by P4E between 1999 and 2015, and 51 media texts containing reference to or direct quotes from P4E published between 1996 and 2015. I analyzed the data using rhetorical analysis to identify how P4E constructed the problem of fundraising and how it mobilized its meaning over nearly 20 years (Winton, 2016). Through the analysis, it was evident that other policy actors were mobilizing similar, if not the same, discourses during this time period, and the need to consider P4E's efforts in relation to those of other groups and individuals was made plain. Thus, I initiated the current study.

Data for the current study includes the 90 documents and texts collected for the study focused on P4E, as well as additional texts produced between 1996 and 2015 that address school fundraising in Ontario but do not include references to or direct quotes from P4E and were not produced by P4E. This second corpus of texts includes 69 media articles, parliamentary debates, political party platform documents, government documents, and research reports. Media articles include those published in the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*. These news sources were selected because they have the highest readership in Ontario (Newspapers Canada, 2016). Texts in both data sets were identified through searches of digital media archives (Factiva), academic databases (CBCA Education, ERIC), Ontario government and parliamentary websites (Legislative Assembly of Ontario), and the Internet. Search terms included “fundraising” AND “Ontario” AND “school” OR “schools” and “NOT People for Education.”

Argumentative Discursive Analysis (ADA)

The ADA began with a close reading of each of the 51 texts in the first data set that were not authored by P4E and the 69 texts in the second data set. Then, during a second reading of each text, phrases that addressed fundraising directly were identified and grouped together in codes named to reflect their main ideas and meanings about fundraising. For example, categories included “schools need the money,” “fundraising is increasing,” “for basics,” and “for enrichment.” Once all the texts were coded, I reviewed the codes to determine the meanings that were mobilized and how they fit together into story lines. I then identified the actors mobilizing the story lines. At this point in the ADA, I compared the fundraising policy meanings identified and mobilized by P4E in the first data set to the story lines mobilized by actors in the second set. Shared meanings and story lines between P4E and other actors, as well as those not mobilized by P4E, were identified. Actors that mobilized similar or complementary story lines were grouped together and considered a discourse coalition. The story lines mobilized by the discourse coalitions in three time periods were identified and compared since it became clear that some actors changed coalitions and that coalitions’ story lines changed over time. The three time periods are the following: 1) 1996–2002 Progressive Conservative government; 2) 2002–2012 Liberal government before the *Fundraising Guideline* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2012); and 3) 2012–2015 Liberal government after the *Fundraising Guideline* (OME, 2012). This process helped answer the first three research questions (above).

At this point, the analysis suggested that only one discourse coalition was explicitly engaging in the struggle over fundraising in the public sphere (e.g., in the media, by producing reports to the public). This coalition raised many cautions and concerns about fundraising, yet studies produced by its members demonstrated that school fundraising was becoming more

prevalent. Thus, I turned my focus to identifying fundraising practices in addition to the story lines about these practices. Many of these practices were reported in the texts in both data sets (e.g., research studies, journalists' investigations, and annual surveys of fundraising practices). I determined that the second discourse coalition, I refer to it as the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition, is most evident through its institutionalized practices rather than through the arguments of its members. I then revisited the data attributed to the alternate discourse coalition, the fund-the-basics coalition, to identify instances of discourse structuration.

To identify the contexts within which the argumentative struggle over school fundraising has taken place and determine how the dominant story line has maintained its dominance over time, I read a wide range of academic articles and books detailing the changing social, political, economic, and historical contexts of Ontario, Canada, and other Western, English-speaking countries since the mid-1980s. I briefly introduced these contexts above and will return to them again below in a discussion of the findings.

Findings

I begin the discussion of the study's findings with a detailed explanation of the key elements of the fund-the-basics coalition. This coalition has consistently argued that government funding should ensure equal opportunity for success for all students in public schools. I then demonstrate that the alternate coalition, one that enacts the argument that school fundraising is desirable and necessary, is hegemonic, and I show how school fundraising has become institutionalized over the past 2 decades. Finally, I discuss the context of school fundraising in Ontario since 1996 that has enabled the fundraising-is-desirable-and-necessary discourse to remain dominant.

Fund-the-Basics

When reviewing the data related to school fundraising in Ontario between 1996 and 2015, the vast majority of the texts mobilize the concerns of the fund-the-basics discourse coalition. This coalition has consistently argued that school fundraising, once a means of providing funds for graduation teas and other frills, has become a strategy to address government funding shortfalls and, due to communities' differing ability to raise funds, creates inequities in the public school system. Members of this coalition include P4E, Metro Parents Network, Social Planning Toronto, Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA), New Democratic Party (NDP) and Liberal Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), and some teacher unions, parents, school trustees, and journalists. Some aspects of this coalition's argument have remained consistent over time, while others have changed, attributable in part to changes in members' own positions in the province (e.g., from leader of a non-governmental organization to premier) and to the introduction of formal fundraising guidelines by Ontario's Ministry of Education.

A consistent argument of the fund-the-basics coalition has been that the funding of the province's public schools is inadequate. Parents, including members of the newly-formed group P4E, first started calling attention to increased fundraising in schools in 1995, and they attributed its growth to changes in education funding (Galt, 1996; Talaga, 1996). As mentioned above, these changes were introduced after the election of a Progressive Conservative (PC) government in 1995, under the leadership of Mike Harris. The government made dramatic cuts to education funding while promising that the cuts would not affect the classroom (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2006). In 1997, the Harris government introduced major changes to ways schools were funded. School boards were no longer allowed to raise revenue through property taxes to supplement

government funding; instead, the government would determine property tax levies and then collect, pool, and redistribute the funds according to a complicated funding formula (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2006). P4E claimed that parent fundraising, a practice once undertaken to provide frills such as graduation teas, had become necessary to ensure schools had the basic resources for teaching and learning, including maps, textbooks, and computers (P4E, 1999, 2000). For example, P4E's 2001 Tracking Report, a report based on survey of Ontario elementary schools, states, "Many of the schools in our sample compensate for shortfalls in the funding formula with increased fundraising for library books (up 9% in three years)" (p. 11). In 2002, the Elementary Tracking Report (P4E, 2002) said, "Increasingly, school communities are compensating for funding shortfalls through fundraising. Since 1997/98, the number of schools reporting fundraising for classroom supplies has increased 68%" (p. 2).

P4E's was not the only voice raising concerns about increased fundraising and attributing its growth to education funding. Kathleen Wynne, then a member of the Metro Parents Network, a group that worked with P4E on its annual survey of schools in the survey's earliest days, asked in 1998, "Is it the intention of the government that parent fundraising makes up the gap in financing?" (Chamberlain, 1998, p. 1). In 1999, Liz Sandals, then the president of OPSBA, asserted, "It is a big expense for parents and I think what we are seeing is that if you reduce the amount of money you spend on education, it is going to come up in some other way" (Rushowy, 1999, p. 1). In 2000, Wynne asserted that parents "can't sell enough muffins to make up the gap" (Rushowy, 2000a, p. 9). Journalists and editors rearticulated the coalition's concerns in their articles and editorials (e.g., Coyle, 2001; Mahoney, 2007), and P4E continued to track parent fundraising in schools in their annual survey and link it to inadequacies in government funding (Fine, 2001; P4E, 2002, 2006, 2010a).

In 2006, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Federation des syndicats de l'enseignement published *Commercialism in Canadian Schools: Who's Calling the Shots*, a report of findings from their study of private funds in public schools across Canada. Speaking about the study's findings, one of the authors expressed that "governments are abdicating their responsibility to fund a public education system. . . . Public funding is being replaced or supplemented through fundraising, advertising, sponsorships and user fees. . . . These are hardly frills or extras but rather what most of us would consider part of a basic education" (Alphonso, 2006, p. 6).

In addition to attributing increased school fundraising to inadequate funding, this discourse coalition expressed on-going concern that since not all school communities could afford to fundraise, some students were not provided with the basic materials needed for learning. Consequently, the practice of school fundraising was contributing to a two-tiered system and undermining the principles of public education in Ontario. In their 2001 Tracking report, P4E (2001) argued, "When school communities are raising money to provide basic classroom supplies and textbooks, and when the top 10% of schools raise as much money as the bottom 70% combined, we know that we are eroding one of the most important principles of the public education system—equity for all students" (p. 12). A 2007 editorial in the *Toronto Star* with the headline "Two-Tier Schools Offer a Lesson in Inequality" expressed the view that "soliciting money from parents to pay for basic educational needs will only exacerbate inequities between schools, raising the disturbing prospect of two-tiered funding in Ontario's public education system" (p. 14). Similarly, in a discussion of the findings of the *Commercialism in Canadian Schools* study, researchers Shaker and Froese-Germain (2006) conclude, "Private funding, inherently unequal, only reinforces existing inequities between schools. And what

suffers irreparably is the integrity and equity of the public system and the education of those students already most vulnerable to economic hardship” (p. 92). Inequities reproduced in schools arising from school fundraising have been a consistent part of this coalition’s argument for changes to the province’s funding policy and, eventually, the government’s policy on fundraising.

In 2003, a Liberal government took over as the ruling party in Ontario. Two of its newly elected MPPs, Kathleen Wynne and Liz Sandals, had been part of the fund-the-basics coalition. Now they were presumably in a position to make the changes they had argued for so passionately. However, P4E’s annual surveys of schools demonstrated that school fundraising continued in Ontario schools and the fund-the-basics coalition continued to raise concerns about the vastly different amounts raised by schools and resulting inequities between them (e.g., Jackson, 2011).

Some members, including Social Planning Toronto (2011), have called for a total ban on school fundraising in Ontario. This position is not shared by all coalition members (e.g., Winsa & Rushowy, 2011), and, after 2005, the fund-the-basics coalition members began calling for a provincial policy on school fundraising that identified the basics for learning and outlined how fundraised money may be spent. For example, in 2010 P4E (2010b) called on the government

to articulate a vision for education that outlines what things should be available to all students in every school, at no extra charge. Once the overall vision has been established, then it will be possible to identify the “extras” that might be funded by fees, fundraising and corporate partnerships. (p. 2)

In 2011, the Ontario Liberal government released a draft of the *Fundraising Guideline* (OME, 2011) that did outline what fundraised dollars could be used to purchase. Notably, it articulated the key discourses mobilized by the fund-the-basics coalition:

When schools and school boards choose to engage in fundraising activities, it is important that they also consider the purposes and principles of public education, including diversity, accessibility, equality of opportunity and inclusivity. . . .

Funds raised for school purposes:

- should not be used to replace public funding for education.
- should not be used to support items funded through the allocated budget of a school board, including but not limited to, learning materials and textbooks or capital projects that increase operating costs. (p. 1)

However, members of the fund-the-basics discourse coalition expressed concern that the proposed *Fundraising Guideline* did not address “the perpetuation of inequities and the overall underfunding of our public system that has led to this reliance on private money to subsidize Ontario students’ education” (Social Planning Toronto, 2011, p. 1; P4E, 2011). It also did not address the private foundations that some schools had set up to support schools financially; school boards do not report funds raised by these foundations nor how they are spent (Social Planning Toronto, 2011). P4E called for the final guidelines to include (or reference) “the materials, programs and resources that should be available to all students in every school” (P4E, 2011b, p. 2). The final *Fundraising Guideline* (OME, 2012), released in 2012, did not include such a list, and coalition members asserted the guidelines did not address the gap between affluent and poorer schools (Calis, Cunha, & Grover, 2012; Winsa & Rushowy, 2012) and “have no teeth” (Calis et al., 2012, sidebar). Importantly, as discussed below, the *Fundraising Guideline* (OME, 2012) did little to stem the tide of school fundraising and address the vast differences between schools (P4E, 2015).

Finally, over time P4E and others started to talk about fundraising not only as a problem attributable to education funding policy but also as a consequence of parents’ desires to provide their children with enrichment opportunities. In their 2009 Report, P4E noted,

Fundraising continues to increase for a number of reasons—some economic, and some attitudinal. In some cases, parents are raising funds for things no longer funded by school boards or the province. . . . Boards can no longer respond to parents' expectations by raising taxes to pay for things parents want in their children's schools. This, coupled with a consumerist shift in society, has led parents to assume that if they want it, they have to pay for it themselves. (p. 9)

In 2011, a member of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa agreed with P4E's director who said parents are partly to blame:

We all feel we have the right to pay for whatever it is we want. We're a more individualistic society than we were 20 years ago. And as parents, we're all kind of nuts. Everything has to be perfect for my child all the time. (Winsa & Rushowy, 2011, para. 42)

Fundraising-Is-Necessary-and-Desirable: An Institutionalized Practice

Unlike the campaign against school fundraising, explicit arguments in support of the practice are less common and specific actors in the discourse coalition are less easily identifiable. Rather, the dominance of the discourse in support of fundraising is most clearly evident through the intensification and normalization of the practice. According to Hajer (1993), a discourse coalition can be said to be dominant if 1) "it dominates the discursive space" (the condition of discourse *structuration*) and 2) its dominance "is reflected in the institutional practices of that political domain" (p. 48). The institutionalization of school fundraising in Ontario since 1996 is evident in a number of ways. Below, I first review this evidence and then present arguments of the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition.

First, as acknowledged by members of both discourse coalitions, school fundraising was taking place in some schools long before the Harris government was elected. The concern for the fund-the-basics coalition is that this already-institutionalized practice was being undertaken for new reasons, on a larger scale, and with troubling consequences. P4E's annual surveys since 1999 capture the growing amounts raised and the wide variety of resources purchased with

fundraised dollars, including basics. The 2002 Elementary Tracking Report, for example, reported, “Since 1997/98, the number of schools fundraising for classroom supplies has increased 68%” (P4E, 2002, p. 61). It estimated parents fundraised \$38 million dollars in 2002, with the amounts raised varying from \$0 to \$65,000 per school. Further, it reported that “the top 10% of schools raised as much money as the bottom 60%” (P4E, 2002, p. 62). By 2015, the range in amounts raised had widened and the percentage of elementary schools fundraising for learning resources had increased to 47% from 29 % in 2002 (P4E, 2002, 2015).

The institutionalization of fundraising is also evident in the creation of board and provincial government policies related to fundraising since 1996. For example, in 2001, the Toronto District School Board developed a formal fundraising policy and created the Central Equity Fund designed to enable individuals and schools that raise significant funds to contribute some of them to schools less able to raise money (L. Brown, 2002). A board trustee explained, “It just makes it more fair when a system so diverse in socioeconomic terms can have a cache of money that the ‘haves’ can contribute to, and the ‘have-nots’ can benefit from” (L. Brown, 2002, para. 5). In 2007, the Peel District School Board created a controversial policy that permits parents and community members to fundraise for major capital projects, including pools, gyms, and portable class rooms (“Worrisome Bake Sales,” 2007; Rushowy, 2007). In 2004, the OME advised schools to report all school-generated funds, including those raised through fundraising, in their annual financial statements; however, some parents were able to circumvent this institutional requirement by setting up charitable foundations to raise money for schools. In 2007, P4E (2007) reported there were at least 12 of these foundations, and by 2011 the number had more than doubled (Social Planning Toronto, 2011). Both the introduction of the accounting requirement and the establishment of the charitable foundation illustrate that the government and

parents expected school fundraising to be a permanent practice. Shaker and Froese-Germain (2006) from the CCPA commented on the institutionalization of fundraising in 2006:

Certainly the consistent and brutal cuts made to our social programs including education, over the past decade, have in some respects naturalized fundraising initiatives. Parents expect it and, as everyone knows, will wade waist-deep through snow drifts to collect enough money to ensure their kids don't go without.
(p. 91)

Indeed, P4E's (2010c) 2010 survey of school councils found that fundraising was the activity that took up the most of the councils' time.

The institutionalization of school fundraising is further evident during periods of teacher contract negotiations and protest. In 2000, 2005, 2012, and 2015, teachers threatened to withdraw or actually withdrew their involvement in fundraising activities, characterizing their participation as necessary but not required as part of their formal responsibilities. In 2000, for example, the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation proclaimed, "Minister, if you want sports, music, clubs and theatrical activities, then you will have to fund them. There will be no more bake sales, no more car washes and no more chocolate bars" (Rushowy, 2000b, p. NE01). Some parents expressed dismay at the withdrawal of teachers' involvement in fundraising, noting how kids had come to look forward to the events and funds each year (Kalinowski & Gillespie, 2005). Some parents expressed similar worry about the consequences of a new ban on the sale of foods with high levels of sugar, fat, and sodium in schools introduced in 2010, since pizza lunches and bake sales were an important source of fundraising revenue (L. Brown, 2010; Rushowy, 2011). The policy, however, included a 10-day exception so schools could continue fundraising by selling pizza and other foods not typically permitted.

As discussed, in 2012, the OME introduced the *Fundraising Guideline* which specifies that “items funded through provincial grants, such as classroom learning materials, textbooks and repairs or for capital projects” may not be purchased with fundraised dollars (p. 1). However, P4E’s 2015 survey found that 47% schools still spent fundraised dollars on learning resources.

Through the creation of policies and intensification of school fundraising since 1996, it is clear that both the PC and Liberal governments, school boards, schools, and many school staff, school councils, parents, and students are members of the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable discourse coalition. As mentioned, explicit arguments in support of school fundraising are not as prevalent as arguments raising concerns about it. The PC government, when it did comment on the issue directly, suggested that a perceived need to fundraise to meet the needs of classrooms could be attributed to school board spending decisions rather than to the funding formula itself since the province’s education budget had increased since the PC government had taken office (Fine, 2001). This government also mobilized an equity argument of its own: it claimed that the changes to education funding had made the education system *more* equitable since it was no longer left to municipalities (Fine, 2001).

As discussed above, when the Liberal government came to office in 2003 some members of the fund-the-basics coalition were elected as MPPs and were thus engaged in new practices, positioned differently by the story lines, and presumably exposed to new discourses that may have altered their beliefs and interests (Hajer, 1997). When asked about fundraising, the Liberal government mobilized many of the same arguments as the fund-the-basics coalition. Then-Premier Dalton McGuinty proclaimed, “What we will not and cannot accept here in Ontario is that kids are out there fundraising for the basics” (“Funding Public Schools,” 2010, p. A20); however, the government also emphasized that fundraising is a practice that provides

opportunities for enrichment for students and engagement for parents and communities. For example, MPP Kathleen Wynne, in a parliamentary debate when Minister of Education in 2007, said, “Fundraising is much more than just the dollars and cents that communities raise for projects. It is about community cohesion. It is about community building” (“School Fundraising is Raising Questions,” 2007). The *Fundraising Guideline*’s (OME, 2012) introduction includes the following statement:

The province recognizes that parents and communities may choose to support their schools through fundraising activities. These activities have the potential to enrich the experience of our students, but also help build a broader sense of community outside school hours. Funds can be raised for a particular school or on a board level—both have the potential to enhance parent engagement and contribute to a student’s educational experience. (p. 1)

Others, such as OPSBA president and school board trustee Rick Johnson (Mahoney, 2007), concurred.

Indeed, many members of the fund-the-basics coalition have also expressed this belief since 1996. For example, P4E’s director said in 2007,

We don't think parent fundraising is inherently evil. It is a way for people to be involved in the school, it's fun, it can build school spirit, it is a way of engaging people. It is not bad in and of itself . . . just the notion that it is a necessary part of public education. (Payne, 2007, p. J4)

In their response to the draft *Fundraising Guideline*, P4E (2011b) explains,

While we understand that fundraising can be a positive activity in a school, and can enhance parent and community engagement, we feel it is vital that the province not only provide a clearly stated and broadly based vision for education, but that the province also outline exactly what programs, materials and resources should be available in all schools. (p. 1)

The above quotes provide evidence of discourse structuration and further demonstrate the hegemony of the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable discourse coalition.

Finally, reminiscent of an earlier PC government argument, in response to calls to address differences in amounts fundraised, the Liberal government stated that it is up to school boards rather than the provincial government to ensure funds are distributed equitably (Rushowy, 2007a, 2007b; “School Fundraising is Raising Questions,” 2007; Lorrigo, 2013).

Enabling Contexts of Ontario’s Fundraising Story Lines

I now return to the contexts in which the meanings of the story lines identified above were “acquired, sustained, and transformed” (Hajer, 1997, p. 122) to explain why an understanding of school fundraising as necessary and desirable has remained dominant. I have discussed some of these influences on fundraising advocacy elsewhere as well (Winton, 2016).

As discussed above, Harris’s PC government was elected in 1995 within the context of increasing neoliberalism across the province, country, and beyond. Then-Premier Harris followed through with commitments to cut taxes and reduce government spending, cutting funding to public services, including a 22.7% cut to education, and changed how schools were funded (Bedard & Lawton, 2000; Gidney, 1999). Some school boards lost large amounts of funding (Bedard & Lawton, 2000), and some parents, middle-class parents in particular, who had relied on public schools to play a key role in reproducing their families’ class status, could no longer count on schools to play this part (Crawford, 1996; Griffith & Smith, 2005). An alternate source of funds was needed for schools to maintain the opportunities and privileges afforded to students from the middle class, and fundraising, an historical practice in many schools, offered a means to accessing these funds.

Furthermore, under the political rationality of neoliberalism (W. Brown, 2006), one that emphasizes individual responsibility for one’s success and failure, a good parent is constructed

as one that does whatever he or she can to ensure his or her child's success (Winton, 2016). In this context, a child's achievements serve as indicators of a good parent, and particularly of a good mother (Landeros, 2011). Thus, while middle class parents have historically endeavored to organize their home and school lives to support schools' work and reproduce their children's class position, these efforts assume an additional importance and urgency under neoliberalism (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Kimelberg, 2014). School fundraising makes sense in this context and helps explain the ever-increasing fundraising efforts by parents in higher-income neighbourhoods and differences in amounts raised between schools (in addition to the financial inability of families to engage in and contribute to fundraising in lower income neighbourhoods; P4E, 2011a, 2013; Winsa & Rushowy, 2011). Hajer (1997) explains that the power of story lines is that they "sound right" (p. 63), and research on the middle class in Ontario and beyond suggests that a story line that constructs fundraising as necessary and desirable because it addresses gaps in government funding and, importantly, provides children with enrichment, will sound right to middle class parents (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Kimelberg, 2014). Furthermore, supporting public schools with private money raised through fundraising fits into the overall trend towards the privatization of public education in Ontario and across Canada, encouraged by neoliberalism (Robertson, 2005).

Concluding Thoughts

School fundraising is a normalized practice in Ontario's public schools. By undertaking an argumentative discourse analysis of the struggle over school fundraising policy in Ontario over the past 2 decades, I have demonstrated that this struggle has involved two discourse coalitions: the fund-the-basics coalition and the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition.

The latter coalition's hegemony in the struggle to redefine the long-standing practice of school fundraising can be attributed to dominant neoliberal discourses in the policy's broader socio-historical context that advocate individualism, privatization, and reduced government spending on public services. In this context, giving private money to public schools to provide one's children with opportunities to enhance their chance of success in a competitive and unpredictable world makes sense.

This article illustrates the utility of Hajer's argumentative discourse theory and ADA to education policy research and highlights contributions of the current study to understanding of advocacy, media, and education policy change. It is one of the first to use Hajer's argumentative discursive theory and ADA to understand education policy in Ontario and in education policy research more generally (see Dobric, 2006, for another example). It shows that the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition's dominance is most apparent through institutionalized practices in schools, school districts, and the provincial government rather than in explicit arguments mobilized by coalition members. Thus, this study demonstrates that a discourse analysis method that examines written arguments only may be inadequate in efforts to identify dominant discourse coalitions; examining policy practices may be required as well. In the current study, evidence of fundraising practices was available in reports, but this may not always be the case. Future research may consider incorporating additional methods (including interviews, Hajer, 2006) to collect data about practices and examine them as part of the argumentative discourse analysis.

The importance of considering practices in addition to textual arguments is also evident in the case of school fundraising in Ontario when actors who were once members of the fund-the-basics coalition became members of the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition, and

yet in their new roles they (along with other Liberal MPPs) continued to mobilize the arguments of the fund-the-basics coalition while enacting practices that undermined these arguments. This suggests that repeating the story lines of an opposing coalition may be a rhetorical strategy, rather than an instance of discourse structuration, when the story lines are repeated by members of the hegemonic coalition.

The study also illuminates the important role of the media in argumentative politics. Not only do media stories inform the public about various arguments about an issue and influence their understanding of it, they also mobilize different coalitions' story lines and bring the existence of different coalitions to the fore. From a methodological perspective, media stories can help researchers identify members of discourse coalitions, and so researchers aiming to identify discourse coalition members should look to a range of media sources. The current study's corpus of media texts was limited to articles published in two of Ontario and Canada's most widely read newspapers; broadening the range of media outlets to include smaller and less mainstream publications may reveal more members of the two coalitions and perhaps other coalitions as well.

Finally, the findings raise an important question for policy advocates: At what level and to whom should they direct their arguments? In the case of school fundraising in Ontario, the fund-the-basics coalition aimed to change the Ontario government's funding policy and, over time, also its fundraising policy, whereas the fundraising-is-necessary-and-desirable coalition was enacting fundraising policy at the local level. Perhaps the fund-the-basics coalition should mobilize its arguments at the local level (i.e., with schools and school councils) and aim to change practices there as well as at the provincial level. They might talk to parents and other community members in schools that do not raise money for basics to find out how and why this

local practice has emerged within a broader context that encourages schools to do otherwise. Future research that examines how discourse coalitions engage in argumentative struggles over policy at different levels simultaneously might prove useful for advocates hoping to change practices in schools, districts, and provincial governments.

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